

Barack Obama pays tribute to George W. Bush at presidential library opening

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The dedication ceremony for the George W. Bush Presidential Center at Southern Methodist University in Dallas Thursday was an opportunity for the American political elite, Democratic and Republican wing alike, to express its essential unity and singleness of purpose.

President Barack Obama was on hand, as were former presidents Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, to celebrate probably the most hated resident of the White House in US history, the younger Bush, whose administration is associated by tens of millions with illegal war, torture and corporate criminality.

Although not surprising, Obama's fulsome praise for his predecessor, in front of an audience that included former Vice President Dick Cheney and, according to the *New York Times*, "a collection of current and former foreign leaders and lawmakers as well as hundreds of former Bush administration officials and thousands of his admirers," was especially significant.

The current president told his audience, "The first thing I found in that desk the day I took office was a letter from George [W. Bush], and one that demonstrated his compassion and generosity."

Obama referred twice to Bush's "compassion" on Thursday. Bush, a notorious sadist, presided enthusiastically over 152 executions as governor of Texas, more than any other governor in modern American history, launched an unprovoked invasion of Iraq—resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and the destruction of an entire society—and authorized abuse of detainees at US military bases and secret "black sites" around the world.

Referring to remarks made previously by Clinton, Obama went on, "to know the man is to like the man, because he's comfortable in his own skin. He knows who he is. He doesn't put on any pretenses. He takes his job seriously, but he doesn't take himself too seriously. He is a good man."

Bush, a rich man's son and former alcoholic who has difficulty forming a coherent thought or sentence (he joked at the dedication that there was a time in his life when he "wouldn't have been found at a library, much less found one"), was an empty vessel through whom powerful corporate, military and intelligence forces worked, knowing they would have an entirely free hand.

The *Washington Post* notes that the new presidential center's "Decision Points Theater focuses on four key moments of the Bush presidency: the 2003 invasion of Iraq; the decision announced in January 2007 to send an additional 30,000 troops to that country (known as the troop surge); the administration's heavily criticized response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005; and the decision to bail out the banks after the financial collapse in the fall of 2008."

Aggression against defenseless peoples, indifference to the suffering of the American population and devotion to the financial aristocracy—this does indeed sum up the Bush administration. But would not such a description serve equally well for the current White House and its policies? The sitting president pores over "kill lists" and has made the case for the right of American authorities to murder US citizens without a trial or charges being laid.

The replacement of Bush and the Republicans by Obama was nothing more than a political facelift, bound up in part with the need to win the support of upper middle class layers who adhere to identity politics and find the idea of an African American president irresistible.

Millions of working people voted for Obama in November 2008 because they identified him, wrongly, as the antidote to the Bush-Cheney administration, as its antithesis. In fact, even before he took office, in January 2009, Obama took great efforts to signal to the ruling elite that there would be a "seamless transition" from Bush's administration to his own. And in this at least he was being honest. (See: "Obama signals continuity with US

torture regime”)

At the Dallas ceremony, Obama solidarized himself with the “war on terror” proclaimed by Bush, whose most recent sinister expression we have just witnessed in the massive military-police mobilization in Boston.

Obama said, “As we walk through this library, obviously we’re reminded of the incredible strength and resolve that came through that bullhorn as he stood amid the rubble and the ruins of Ground Zero, promising to deliver justice to those who had sought to destroy our way of life.”

Inevitably, and predictably, Obama went out of his way to praise the American military, commenting that Bush and he “share a profound respect and reverence for the men and women of our military and their families.”

Obama’s exorbitant and ludicrous praise for Bush has something to do with the embalmed, ritualistic character of official American political events, in which all the goings-on are scripted.

Furthermore, Obama’s expression of support for Bush’s post-September 11 actions is a specific attempt to justify his own administration’s reckless drive to war against Syria and Iran, where once again bogus claims about chemical and nuclear weapons are brought forward to justify another bloody neo-colonial operation.

The “rehabilitation” of George W. Bush, much discussed in the media, has to be seen in this light. What was only a few years ago acknowledged by the US media to be a disastrous policy, the large-scale invasion of a Middle Eastern country, is now once again the preferred course of major sections of the American establishment.

However, what the spectacle of five US presidents on stage together—rather pathetically patting each other on the back—brought to mind, above all, was the socio-economic crisis driving the policy of war and global domination. The sight of the past and present executives rather nervously shuffling around on stage, except for the wheelchair-bound Bush senior, was hardly one to inspire confidence. Obama perhaps let on more than he intended when he observed that the ex-presidents had been called “‘the world’s most exclusive club’—but the truth is, our club is more like a support group.”

The American ruling elite feels besieged and beleaguered. Its reckless belligerence, at home and abroad, expresses an increasing desperation. Terrorism is not their greatest fear, but rather upheavals provoked by the ever more intolerable living and working conditions for broad layers of the people. The basis for these corrupt representatives of the corporate financial aristocracy to

come together, despite various tactical differences and personal animosities, is their undying hatred and fear of the working population in the US and elsewhere.

Obama’s apologists in the liberal and left media strained to present his appearance on behalf of the war criminal Bush in a positive light. The *New York Times*, one of whose central, self-imposed tasks is to present the Democratic and Republican parties as bitter political enemies, carried a headline, “Obama’s Delicate Task at Bush Library Event,” intended to suggest that Obama had to navigate carefully at the Dallas event given his record of opposition to Bush.

The suggestion in the headline was belied in part by the article’s content, especially when the author cited the comments of former Bush speechwriter Marc Thiessen, who asserted that if Obama were to be “totally honest, he would say that except for interrogations, he adopted almost the entire Bush counterterrorism policy, some of it voluntarily, some of it involuntarily, but most of it voluntarily.”

John Nichols of the *Nation*, an ardent Obama supporter, found his own way of dealing with the current president’s performance at the former president’s honoring (“Searching for the Praetorian Guard at the George W. Bush Museum”): he simply ignored it, not mentioning Obama’s name once.

In any event, there is a popular saying about the danger of putting all your eggs in one basket. The flock of Democratic and Republican presidents, vice presidents, cabinet members, members of congress, etc., may draw strength and courage from being in each other’s company, but their chumminess and unanimity on every major question is leading the population to draw radical conclusions: that the entire political system is bankrupt and deserves to be overthrown.



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